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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002790

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DEPT. FOR EUR/SE AND NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2017
TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM UN IZ TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: UNAMI OFFICIAL SEES GREATER GOT INTEREST
IN UN ROLE ON KIRKUK

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3595
1B. ANKARA 1442

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Former UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Charge Michael Schulenburg sees increased GOT interest in a UN role in defusing tensions over the future status of Kirkuk. He sensed a new GOT willingness and approach. Schulenburg indicated that Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani was also surprisingly open to his ideas during a recent meeting in Erbil. Barzani did not disagree with Schulenburg's assessment that there needs to be compromise on the final borders of the Kurdish region and that an Article 140 referendum on Kirkuk's future status would not produce an outcome favorable to Iraq's Kurds. Barzani did, however, continue to draw a line at compromising on the future status of the city of Kirkuk. END SUMMARY

GOT More Open to UN Role

12. (C) Schulenburg told DCM on November 15 that he had stopped in Ankara to consult with GOT officials at their request, and on instructions from New York. He had met earlier in the day with MFA U/S Apakan and GOT Deputy Coordinator for Iraq Murat Ozcelik, and would be meeting with GOT Iraq Coordinator Oguz Celikkol. Schulenburg was pleasantly surprised by what he characterized as the Turks' change in attitude toward a UN role mediating the future status of Kirkuk. During a previous visit to Ankara in June (ref b), the Turks had demonstrated no enthusiasm for UN involvement. They feared such involvement would lend international credibility to the Article 140 referendum process, which the Turks saw as flawed. GOT officials had argued that the process would allow Iraqi Kurds to assume control over the city of Kirkuk thanks to their ongoing efforts to alter the demographic make-up of the city and manipulation of voter rolls.

13. (C) To his surprise, Schulenburg said GOT officials had expressed much more support for a UN role during his November

15 meetings. DCM noted that since his June visit to Ankara, PM Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) had won re-election, Turkey and Iraq had established a basis for closer cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts, and GOT officials had realized cooperation with the KRG will be necessary to deal with the threat the terrorist PKK poses to Turkey. They are looking at things in a different way. After Erdogan made a big push to ensure UNSYG Ban-Ki Moon's presence at the Istanbul Iraq Neighbors Ministerial, GOT calculations on the utility of UN involvement may have also changed.

Barzani Also Open to Compromise

¶4. (C) Schulenburg also related aspects of his October 31 meeting in Erbil with KRG President Massoud Barzani, noting his surprise at Barzani's openness to his ideas. Barzani met with Schulenburg one-on-one, with only an interpreter present. Schulenburg described Barzani as very gracious and welcoming, a far cry from the chilly reception he had anticipated. Schulenburg said he emphasized with Massoud Barzani his view that the Kurdish concept of the Article 140 referendum is ill-conceived and fundamentally flawed and could be fatal to the long-term viability of a Kurdish entity in Iraq. Noting that no state or governing power had ever doubled its territory without going to war, Schulenburg said if the Kurds insist upon unilaterally imposing their conditions on the referendum, it will be seen as illegitimate and probably lead to violence. He urged that Barzani consider consolidating the gains achieved by Iraqi Kurds to date. According to Schulenburg, Barzani listened intently

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and did not disagree with any of his arguments. While he expressed a willingness to consider compromises, he drew a line at giving up the Kurdish aim of incorporating the city of Kirkuk within Kurdish territory.

¶5. (C) With us, Schulenburg urged greater attention by the U.S. and others in the international community to the Kirkuk issue. He emphasized his view that the Kurds have only a year or so to resolve this issue in a way that can gain broad support both within Iraq and from the international community. Thereafter, the Kurdish position will begin to erode and the potential for violence will steadily increase. He underscored the need to focus on establishing a firm boundary for Iraqi Kurds. Accomplishing this would make them more likely to be amenable to compromise on a host of other issues related to national reconciliation in Iraq. DCM agreed, noting that Turkey could be helpful in providing positive economic incentives to Iraqi Kurds to promote their responsible engagement and willingness to compromise.

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